668 the Belorussian language one-year courses were made available in
871 the secondary schools. These courses remained available, as a provisional measure, for all, up to regular graduates of the pedagogical department of the Belorussian University. Taken all together these measures made it possible as early as the beginning of the academic year of 1924, to change the curriculum to the native language in schools, kindergartens, adult evening schools, and stations for the liquidation of illiteracy.

563 Parallel with the Belorussianization of the schools Narkompros[1]
871 took practical steps to guarantee their own languages to the schools of the national minorities. The work among the Jewish population was particularly successful. The special Jewish inspectors of Narkompros, and in the neighboring towns as well, worked intensively to open schools, kindergartens, orphan homes and libraries for the Jewish population. This great task was not always accomplished smoothly, and thus aroused some dissatisfaction against the zealous promulgators of the national policy. Under the new system parents did not have a free choice of schools for their children; besides, in the cities and especially among the Jewish intelligentsia, only Russian was spoken in the family, and the children experienced great difficulty in learning Hebrew when they got to the Jewish national schools. Then, in addition, after completing a Jewish secondary school they had a very limited choice of higher schools for further education. A thorough knowledge of Russian was necessary to pass the entrance examinations into an institution of higher learning outside Belorussia, and in the Belorussian university itself there was only one Jewish subdivision (section) in the educational department where the lectures were given in Hebrew. Therefore some parents went to work in the R.S.F.S.R. or sent their children to school there, and thus the Jewish secondary schools, especially the upper classes, were not full, having three to five pupils in a class. Nevertheless the work accomplished was great and fully responded to the national feelings of the masses among whom Zionistic tendencies still existed. Among the special normal schools in Belorussia were the pedagogical academy in Gomel' which had instruction in Hebrew, and the agricultural technical school in Kurasovshchina, not far from Minsk. Jewish children were fully assured of having seven-year schooling and even secondary schooling in some cities. Homeless orphans were collected in Jewish orphan asylums, and there were a sufficient number of kindergartens. /6/

[1] [the People's Commissariat of Public Education of Belorussia--Analyst]

563 Less significant was the network of educational institutions where
87/ the teaching was done in Polish, although in Narkompros there were special inspectors for Polish schools. The reasons for this situation will be told below.

873 Narkompros[1] directed particular attention to the organization and development of the Belorussian State University. Through a common effort this young cultural center established a serious course of study and acquired a well-deserved prestige. In a comparatively short time a solid group of well-known professors had been chosen, among them the following Belorussian scholars: the popular and generally respected philologist Ia. Lesik, the mathematician Krutalevich, Piotukhovich, who was a literary specialist, Shchekotikhin, who was a professor of art, as well as others. It should be noted that the first graduates of the University, in 1931 and 1932, were better than the later ones. The reason is that despite the rather difficult conditions of student life they were not distracted into other pursuits. They were required to learn, not to participate in various bombastic political campaigns and social undertakings, which were the affair of the Communist Party. Afterwards, unfortunately, the examinations of student activists were judged according to their participation in
66/ political campaigns. A prominent role in the administrative organization of the University was played by the rector, Professor Picheta, a man who had been very successfully selected for this high post. Although not a Belorussian himself, he worked actively and conscientiously to promulgate all measures necessary for strengthening the University. He was arrested in 1930 and, like many others who were arrested that same year, subjected to "investigation" because of a "Union for the Liberation of Belorussia" (the S. V. B. - in Belorussian "Sayuz Vyzvalen'nya Belorusi"), which was created at the time by the G. P. U. of the B. S. S. R. More will be said about this below. In the activity of the S. B. V. according to the "plan" (or as popularly put the "tale") of the G. P. U., Professor Picheta was to play the part of a "connecting link" between the S. B. V. and the "Union for the Liberation of Russia", also created for the occasion by the G. P. U. in Russia, which was to be headed by the well-known academician Platonov, a historian like Picheta. After the failure of the "activities" of the S. B. V., Professor Picheta, like the others, was sent into exile and served it in the city of Vyatka where he distributed tickets in the city dining rooms. Due to the stubborn petitions

[1] [the People's Commissariat of Public Education of Belorussia--Analyst]

668 depended on the capable efforts of the new Belorussian workers who
631 were sent into what had been Gomel' Guberniya. They were able to
728 cope with the task.

Minority Problems

563 The equality on the Belorussian territory of the four official
191 languages, Belorussian, Russian, Polish, and Jewish, was recognized by a govermental decree. In practice only Belorussian was at all widely used, and Russian was employed in dealing with institutions of the U. S. S. R. Jewish and Polish were spoken in the national schools, kindergartens, theaters, libraries, and so on. The severity with which equality of the four languages was enforced sometimes became absurd. In the town of Rechitsa in 1928, at a municipal teachers conference, one participant who was the principal of a Jewish school made her observations in a speech in Jewish. Of course
661 an interpreter had to be used. A Belorussian schoolteacher, Mokhnach, who had been renowned in the past for his liberal convictions and activities, but who unfortunately was versed in the unexpected twists and turns of Soviet policy, proposed quite correctly that all speakers use "Russian, as it is the most widely understood." For this proposal, which would appear to have been quite innocent, Mokhnach was accused of Great Russian chauvinism, immediately fired from his job, excluded from the trade union, and also deprived of a pension after his forty-five years of service in the school system. This shows just how unsuccessfully the Soviets could choose a subject upon whom to demonstrate how severely and unrelentingly anyone would be punished who transgressed against the Stalinist policy towards the minorities.

563 Special court chambers where litigation was conducted in
[692] Jewish were opened in the large cities to serve the Jewish population. In small towns and in some larger ones where Jews lived in compact groups, local and village soviets were formed -- providing service for the population in its native language. /14/

The national work concerning the so-called Polish population of Belorussia was a rather special case. In Minsk and in other cities there were several responsible workers /in the nationalist movement/ who were Poles by nationality. They were almost all Communists and native-born Poles, for the most part deriving from the Polish Socialist Party (P. P. S.). Moreover, twenty-five percent of the native

[62] Moreover, twenty-five percent of the native
563 Belorussian population professed Catholicism, while seventy-five
[798] percent was Orthodox. Even before the revolution the Catholic priests, and they were almost all Poles, made propaganda in the Catholic churches to the effect that all who professed Catholicism were Poles. As a matter of fact these "Poles" had not even mastered the Polish
563 language and were Belorussian by nationality. In the heyday of the
661 nationalities policy, the Polish Communists, perhaps only for reasons of propaganda and of course under the auspices and with the permission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, renamed the whole Koydanovskiy Rayon, which is situated on the Polish-Belorussian boundary and has a Belorussian population of some thirty thousand, the Polish National Rayon. Kaydanov (sic), the rayon center, was renamed Dzerzhinsk and the whole rayon called Dzerzhinskiy. In the rayon center, on the square dedicated to the fierce, even though dead, chief of the rayon, a monument was erected to Dzerzhinskii which portrayed him standing straight up on a pedestal in a full-length soldier's overcoat and with a long face and a small beard. In the National Rayon compulsory promulgation of the Polish language was begun, a measure which the population had difficulty in comprehending. All institutions, schools, and village reading-rooms were changed over to Polish and the rayon newspaper came out in Polish. The population was mystified by these newly-created difficulties. After 1930, all the efforts to organize the Polish National Rayon in the name of Dzerzhinskii were pronounced a diversion of Polish spies. The higher leaders and organizers of the rayon were arrested and punished severely. Such a fate also overtook the Shestakovskiy Polish Soviet, named after the Polish communist Markhlevskii, in the Kopyl' Rayon, Minsk Oblast'. The Dzerzhinskiy Rayon retained the name of its chief and was once again called a Belorussian rayon. Both the village soviet and the local population of this ill-fated region were punished, almost one half of the population finding itself in Siberia eventually. Thus the completely innocent local populace paid dearly for the nationalities policy.

701 Belorussianization extended even into parts of the Red Army. The
563 Second Division in Minsk and the Thirty-third in Mogilev, for example, were renamed Belorussian territorial divisions in 1927. These two divisions were recruited exclusively in Belorussia -- it was intended to change the commands and the training into Belorussian in as short a period as possible. To prepare a staff of officers half the

701 students at the Minsk officers school were also recruited exclusively
563 from among Belorussians, /15/ and all the training as well as the commands were given in Belorussian. A special corps of specialists on Belorussia, with the experienced philologist, Baranovskii, as their leader, was selected for work in the officers' school. All the military regulations of the Red Army were translated into Belorussian. But the Belorussianization of these two divisions was sharply curtailed after 1930, the Belorussian specialists were fired from the officers school, and a significant number of them were subsequently arrested together with their leader. By 1932 no traces remained of the Belorussianization of these two territorial divisions, The Second Division, quartered in Minsk, had its name changed from Territorial to Experienced Regular Division, and the Belorussianization of parts of the Red Army was pronounced a harmful diversionary activity.

563 At one point, in order to strengthen the Soviet state, the
647 slogan of "going to the soil" was promoted in Belorussia. The main reason for this was to fill the Soviet state apparatus with local workers independent of their nationality, and by this it was intended that the local Party workers, being native inhabitants of the area and knowing the language, customs, and way of life of the Belorussians, would be the more close to the national masses. However this campaign did not have any widespread success and was swallowed up by ensuing campaigns which were of a broader nature.

Propaganda among the Peasants

665 In 1924, a movement began in Belorussia under the noisy title of "Let's face the land," and it involved the mass dispatch of responsible workers from the centers into the rayon and village soviets for agitation and organizational work there. When the NEP had attained a steady tempo the peasantry found itself in a very
484 difficult situation. The prices of agricultural products were low and those of factory made products immeasurably high. For example, a peasant had to pay no less than 320 kilograms of grain for an ordinary Tula samovar. At the time the hard and reliable Soviet chervonets had acquired a solid position in the economy. But the peasants had no
665 chervontsi . . . To raise the depressed mood of the peasantry propa-
557 gandists were sent out for extended periods, and some of them were even left in the rayons for permanent work as responsible Party leaders. It was decided simultaneously to advance non-Party peasants and factory workers to responsible positions. Such a new worker was

called a 'vydvizhenets' /promoted worker/. Generally such workers were appointed as deputies of various kinds; independent work was not given to them /16/ because of their non-Party status and the fear of distortions in the Party line . . . To tell the truth they often had to sail with the wind, orient themselves according to Party workers, and compromise with their convictions, especially in settling peasant problems. The leaders of the Belorussian national movement made use of this well-advertised and all-embracing campaign[1] to send out their best propagandists for further work in planting the Soviet state apparatus "in the soil" and especially to select vydvizhenets workers /for their own ends/. It would be possible to mention many successful vydvizhenets, as examples. For instance in the Slutskiy Okrug, the peasant vydvizhenets Fedorovich enjoyed unquestionable authority, occupying the post of deputy president of the okrug executive committee. The peasant vydvizhenets Dubovtsev made such a favorable impression with his work that as a result he even became Deputy President of the Belorussian Supreme Soviet. He possessed the necessary qualifications in administrative work, was modest both in his personal life and on the job, and a promoter of the national work. Part of the vydvizhenets group returned to their former jobs in the kolkhozes and factories, and a very insignificant portion entered the Party.

The official organs which had the job of guiding the national work were the so-called National Commissions in the center and the district centers. The staff of a National Committee was composed of representatives of the separate nationalities. However they had no practical or organizational significance. The work was carried on outside their auspices and without their guidance. It was almost a dead superstructure of which there were and are many in the Soviet system.

Belorussians in Poland

Everything done by the nationalists in the B. S. S. R. had a colossal influence upon the Belorussians, especially upon the youth and intelligentsia, living in western Belorussia, which was under Polish rule. There they had no right even having been deprived of the right to acquire property. Without renouncing its nationality the intelligentsia could not find work. The Belorussian primary and high schools were closed, although they were

[1] [To raise the morale of the peasants caught in an unfavorable economic situation. Cf. p. 19, Cat. 116--Analyst]

661 night of St. John Kupala. The same happened to the historical
536 drama Kastus' Kalinovskii which portrays the heroic struggle of
626 the Belorussians in 1863 under Kastus' Kalinovskii's leadership. It was not saved by the circumstance that Kalinovskii was hung in Wilno by Murav'ev, the man who subdued the rebellion. 'Masheka', a play based on the legend of the founding of Mogilev, was also taken off the stage.

They even turned their attentions to the travel ing theater
661 which was under the direction of the national artist, Vladislav
545 Golubok. Instead of dramas based on the national life which could
626 thus be understood by the broad masses of peasants and workers, the theater was reduced to giving strange and unintelligible translations. The travel ing company's repertoires was taken under strict surveillance as were those of the national music and singing ensembles. The director of the subdivision of Narkompros devoted to art, Il'ia Gurskii, displayed particular watchfulness in this respect. He could discover "Natsdemovshchina" not only in plays but even in the players' costumes. The artists of the Belorussian National Ensemble of music and song usually appeared on the stage in folk costumes: white trousers and folk blouses embroidered with Belorussian motifs. Gurskii ordered the white trousers to be replaced by black ones and the blouses by another kind which by its style was closer to a jacket, only without Belorussian ornamentation. The busts of the national poets, Ianka Kupala and Iakub Kolos, were removed from the pedestal of the First Belorussian Theater. /32/

563 A manifestation of chauvinism was uncovered even in the
626 Jewish national work. Jewish cultural workers, especially those
536 from other parties -- Social-Democrats (Mensheviks), former
661 Zionists, Bundists, Poal'-Zionists /?/-- were taken under strict supervision. In the Jewish theater the play, Girsh Lekert, was enjoying a great success. It portrays the revolutionary struggle of the Jewish workers in Wilno in 1902. In the course of the play the main character, a worker named Girsh Lekert, makes an attempt on the life of the Governor-General of Wilno, von Wal'. This is a historical fact. In addition to this play, the memory of Girsh Lekert had also been commemorated by placing suitable inscriptions upon the pedestal of a monument to Tsar Alexander II, the bust was broken off after the revolution. In the search for manifestations of national chauvinism it was decided that Girsh Lekert belonged to

* [official propaganda which portrayed the Belorussian national movement as counter-revolutionary, cf. pp. 32-33, category IIC - analyst]

563 the Bund Party, and from this the conclusion was drawn that the
626 Jewish chauvinists were idealizing a chauvinistic party and its
536 members. This was enough to have the play immediately removed
621 from the stage. It was also necessary to destroy the inscriptions on
665 the monument (1). The Bolsheviks cannot bear the popularity of any

1. The monument to Girsh Lekert was placed on the site of the one to Alexander II in Minsk in 1922 (cf. Malaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia) /Little Soviet Encyclopedia/ Vol.IV, 1929 Edition, page 554, and also 1937 Edition, Vol. VI, page 139) and "liquidated" during the Ezhovshchina. Such was also the fate of one of the Minsk streets which in 1922 had been renamed Lekert Street and during the Ezhovshchina was re-renamed Voyoshilov Street.

other Party or its members, even though such popularity actually might be in accordance with historical reality. In this connection still another example is characteristic. The State Publishing House issued a series of biographies in the series called Zhizn' Zamechatel'nykh Liudei. /Lives of Outstanding People/. One of the books was about the life and activity of the famous volunteer Zheliabov. The book had been in circulation for quite a long time when criticism of it appeared in the Soviet press, as a result of which the book was withdrawn. The reason given was that the person of Zheliabov as a national worker was idealized -- this in spite of the fact that Lenin, even though not agreeing with the Narodnovolets tactics, called the movement a "heroic epoch". The real reason lies in the fact that Zheliabov admitted individual terror and advocated personal selflessness which are both very appealing to youth. /33/ The Bolshevik program repudiates individual terror, even though surreptitiously they practice it very widely. They are afraid to infect Soviet youth with the Narodnovolets' ideas about selflessness and thus turn it against themselves.

186 The Belorussians were always very proud of their great an-
661 cestor -- the scholar from Polotsk, a Doctor of Philosophy, and the first man in Belrussia to have a book published -- F. Skarina. In 1512, this great man received the degree of Doctor in medicine at the University of Padua. In one of the museum halls of the University there is even now a full-length portrait of Doctor Skarina among the other University celebrites. Until 1930 a lot of work and research

661 been appointed Deputy President of the Sovnarkom of the B. S. S. R.

I consider it necessary to remark on the absurdity of some 563 statements to the effect that the N. K. V. D. discriminated in 6 favor of the Jews in making its arrests. Such statements are untrue and tainted with anti-Semitism. If the interested party were concerned with establishing the truth, he could find out from documents that all People's Commissars of the B. S. S. R., regardless of how proletarian their extraction, were arrested. The Commissar of the Communal Economy of the B. S. S. R., Waserman, can serve as an example. During the Ezhovshchina he was arrested together with some others, and in prison went out of his mind. His wife was also arrested. The only one to escape arrest was the Deputy Commissar of the Food Industry, Evsei Paksin, and this was just an accident. The high ranking Jewish Party leaders did not escape either.

625 What went on in the rayons was unspeakably horrible. The 661 most primitive accomodations for thousands of people were hastily [697] knocked together. In the city of Rogachevo prisoners were confined in the wintertime in a ruined old castle without stoves, doors or windows. The ruins were surrounded with barbed wire and by a guard. People died; an epidemic of typhus broke out, and the N. K. V. D. had to stop using the prison.

The inhabitants of the rayons adjacent to Poland were in excessively difficult straits as the N. K. V. D. border guard held sway there. Whole villages were emptied of their population. Everyone about whose reliability there was the slightest suspicion or who might have been suspected of being dissatisfied with the Soviet regime, was arrested. It can be stated without exaggeration that a good half of the male population suffered from the persecution. A 'troika's' had jurisdiction over the arrested, and the sentence was final and not subject to appeal. At night the condemed were carted away in trucks to be shot somewhere in the woods. /64/

As to the number of victims of the 1936-1937 terror we can judge by the following indices. Before the war Minsk had a population of about 250, 000, and at the height of the Ezhovshchina from four to five hundred were arrested in a night. At twelve o'clock when the "normal work" of the N. K. V. D. usually began, fear seized the city's population. People could not sleep but waited nervously for the knock and the rustling. There was panic

1 [During the political purges 1936-1937 - Ed.]

only in Minsk but even in Moscow, and they also got to Moscow by way of western Ukraine. They were considered very useful since they did not consume a lot of scarce gasoline.

As a matter of fact Soviet people could not understand the national antagonisms existing in former Poland. In Soviet Belorussia marriages between Belorussians and Jews were a common occurrence, but there, in western Belorussia, it was considered almost impossible and in any case an occurrence quite out of the ordinary. Some Soviet people were also surprised by the extreme subservience of the local population, particularly the peasantry, before government representatives and city people in general. This was the result of the training given by the Polish regime. Nonetheless a very short period of Soviet rule was sufficient to disappoint the population[1] - the new government caused all wares to disappear in the stores; there were queues for every possible trifle; Soviet currency was almost valueless; all acts committed by local people in the past, even of the most innocent nature, were ferreted out and brought to light if they had any relation with the Soviet government which had not existed on that territory at the time. A broad net of N. K. V. D. informers was spread out everywhere; all peace and quiet was shattered by arrests and the frequent occurrence of unexpected and senseless searches. Universal fear and suspicion soon became entrenched on the occupied territory. The local population, particularly the prosperous upper level and the intelligentsia, was very scornful in its relations with Soviet people, no matter who they were, although this feeling was hidden.

At this point it would be possible to terminate our description of Soviet reality on the eve of the Second World War. Only a few words more need to be said concerning the activity of the N. K. V. D. in this comparatively quiet period. It did not stop its arrests. People were always being snatched away, some because of the testimonies of prisoners arrested during the Exhovshchina, others for listening to foreign radio broadcasts. There was a purge among the workers and employees who had been brought to Minsk from Wilno together with a dismantled radio factory. /72/ Those in whose dossiers there was the slightest, most absurd, evidence from the agents were given particularly careful checkups as well as those who had already served some sentence in a concentration camp.

1 [in western Belorussia, annexed to Soviet Belorussia in 1939. Cf cat. 116, pp. 76-79 -- Analyst]

693 Art. 83. The Supreme Court of the Belorussian SSR is elected by the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR for a term of five years.

Art. 84. Regional courts are elected by regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies for a term of five years.

Art. 85. People's courts are elected by the citizens of the district on the basis of universal, direct and equal suffrage by secret ballot for a term of three years.

695 [563] Art. 86. Judicial proceedings in the Belorussian SSR are conducted in the Belorussian language, persons not knowing the language being guaranteed every opportunity of fully acquainting themselves with the material of the case through an interpreter and likewise the right to use their own language in court.

Art. 87. In all courts of the Belorussian SSR cases are heard in public, unless otherwise provided for by law, and the accused is guaranteed the right to be defended by counsel.

693 Art. 88. Judges are independent and subject only to the law.

Art. 89. Supreme supervisory power to ensure the strict observance of the law by all Ministries and institutions subordinated to them, as well as by officials and citizens within the territory of the Belorussian SSR generally, is exercised by the Procurator-General of the USSR directly and also through the Procurator of the Belorussian SSR.

Art. 90. The Procurator of the Belorussian SSR and the regional procurators are appointed by the Procurator-General of the USSR for a term of five years.

Art. 91. District and city procurators are appointed by the Procurator of the Belorussian SSR, subject to the approval of the Procurator-General of the USSR, for a term of five years.

Art. 92. The organs of the Procurator's Office perform their functions independently of any local organs whatsoever, being subordinate solely to the Procurator-General of the USSR.

Chapter VIII. Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens

461 641 Art. 93. Citizens of the Belorussian SSR have the right to work, that is, are guaranteed the right to employment and payment for their work in accordance with its quantity and quality.

The right to work is ensured by the socialist organization of the national economy, the steady growth of the productive forces of Soviet society, the elimination of the possibility of economic crises, and the abolition of unemployment.

Art. 94. Citizens of the Belorussian SSR have the right to rest and leisure.

The right to rest and leisure is ensured by the establishment of an eight-hour working day for factory and office workers, the reduction of the working day to seven or six hours for arduous trades and to four hours in shops where working conditions are particularly arduous, by the institution of annual vacations with full pay for factory and office workers and the provision of a wide network of sanatoria, rest-homes and clubs for the accommodation of the working people.

[Constitution as of July 4, 1947]

641 Art. 96. Citizens of the Belorussian SSR have the right to maintenance in old age and also in case of sickness and disability.

[651] This right is ensured by the extensive development of social insurance of factory and office workers at state expense, free medical service for the working people and the provision of a wide network of health resorts for the use of the working people.

[671] Art. 98. Citizens of the Belorussian SSR have the right to education. This right is ensured by universal, compulsory elementary education; by free education up to and including the seventh grade; by a system of state stipends for outstanding students in higher educational institutions; by instruction in schools being conducted in the native language and by the organization in the factories, state farms, machine and tractor stations and collective farms of free vocational, technical and agronomic training for the working people.

[562] Art. 97. Women in the Belorussian SSR are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life.

The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured to women by granting them an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by state protection of the interests of mother and child, state aid to mothers of large families and to unmarried mothers, maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.

[563] Art. 98. Equality of rights of citizens of the Belorussian SSR, irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, is an indefeasible law.

Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or conversely, any establishment of direct or indirect privileges for, citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law.

[659] Art. 99. In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the Belorussian SSR is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens.

Art. 100. In conformity with the interests of the working people, and in order to strengthen the socialist system, the citizens of the Belorussian SSR are guaranteed by law:

(a) Freedom of speech;
(b) Freedom of the press;
(c) Freedom of assembly, including the holding of mass meetings;
(d) Freedom of street processions and demonstrations.

These civil rights are ensured by placing at the disposal of the working people and their organizations printing presses, stocks of paper, public buildings, the streets, communications facilities and other material requisites for the exercise of these rights.

575 641 Art. 101. In conformity with the interests of the working people, and in order to develop the organizational initiative and political activity of the masses of the people, citizens of the Belorussian SSR are ensured the right to unite in public organizations -- trade unions, co-operative associations, youth organizations,

[Constitution as of July, 1947]

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the Byelorussian people to acquire both the inexhaustible cultural treasures of the Russian people and the great cultural values created by the Socialist Revolution'. 665 186

At the same time Stalin's opponents among the Byelorussian communists were accused of having been too liberal to the Polish minority in Byelorussia, a strange accusation from a party which professes to adhere to an internationalist ideology. The 'polonizing activities' of the Byelorussian 'Trotskyites, Bukharinites and national-fascists' consisted in having allowed a number of localities in Byelorussia to conduct their business in the Polish language and in having sanctioned the existence of a number of Polish schools.[33] 563

The purge of the Byelorussian communists terminated the policy of tolerance which the Byelorussian Government had shown towards its national minorities. This tolerance had been symbolically expressed in the coat of arms of the Byelorussian S.S.R., which contained the inscription 'Workers of the World Unite' in four languages: Byelorussian, Great Russian, Yiddish and Polish. The coat of arms in use since 1937 shows the same inscription in Byelorussian and Great Russian only. Together with the Polish inscription in Byelorussia's coat of arms the 'Polish National District' of the Byelorussian S.S.R. likewise disappeared. This district had served purposes similar to those of the 'Polish National District' of the Ukraine. It was called after Feliks Dzerzhinsky. [186]

KOLAS AND KUPALA – BYELORUSSIAN LEADERS

The history of the fight between the Kremlin and Byelorussian nationalism includes the interesting case of the two prominent poets and writers, Yanko Kupala (1882-1942) and Yakub Kolas, whom the Soviet régime drew over to the side of the 'proletarian revolution'. Both belonged to the petty bourgeois Byelorussian nationalist movement grouped around the weekly *Nasha Niva* (Our Cornfield) which long before the October Revolution was the first publication to advocate autonomy for the Byelorussian people. 186 538

Kupala was the son of an impoverished nobleman unable to pay for a higher education for his son. Kolas was of peasant origin. Kupala and Kolas had in common their violent hatred of the Polish landowners who owned over 6,000,000 acres of Byelorussian soil in 1914. As a symbolic challenge to the Poles they both threw off their Polish-sounding family names of Lutsevich and Mitskevich respectively and became known under their literary pseudonyms.

Kupala and Kolas found it difficult to overcome their 'bourgeois prejudices'. In their innermost feelings they remained nationalists however hard they tried to be 'good Soviet citizens'. In one of his poems

*[Cf. category 186, pp. 155-157--Analyst]

russia became reunited at the price of Western Byelorussia accepting the Soviet totalitarian régime. The B.S.S.R. increased its territory from 48,000 to 80,000 square miles and almost doubled the number of its inhabitants. The merger of Western and Eastern Byelorussia created a State of over 10,000,000 inhabitants uniting almost the entire Byelorussian people. The annexation of Western Byelorussia enabled the Soviet Union to push nearer to Central Europe, but from a merely economic point of view the territory was a liability. Western Byelorussia was easily the most backward part of the Polish State as it existed in the inter-war period. The territory is devoid of any large industry, its agricultural soil is poor and there are but few rail and road communications. Marshes cover a considerable part of Western Byelorussia. In the annexed former Polish province of Polesia which is 14,000 square miles in area, the famous Marshes of Pinsk or Pripet Marshes form 56 per cent of the total territory.[34]

There are but few small towns in Western Byelorussia; only two localities have about 50,000 inhabitants each, Grodno and Brest Litovsk. Originally 'Western Byelorussia' as it had emerged from the Molotov-Ribbentrop deal for the partition of Poland, had one town of 100,000 inhabitants, Bialystok, a centre of the Polish textile industry and the only place in the whole of 'Western Byelorussia' possessing a fairly large industrial class. For this reason, Bialystok was chosen as a kind of emergency capital of Western Byelorussia during the weeks between its occupation by the Red Army and its full incorporation into the B.S.S.R. The 'Peoples Assembly' of Western Byelorussia which on October 28th, 1939, formulated its 'request for admission into the U.S.S.R.' also met in Bialystok.

The new 'centre of Western Byelorussia' had the drawback that it had no Byelorussian population; it had only Polish and Jewish inhabitants and the outskirts of the town were Polish. In view of the national composition of Bialystok and its surroundings the Soviet Government was unable to maintain its claim to the Bialystok area after the end of the war, particularly since it was located to the east of the Curzon line which Russia adopted in principle as the Polish-Russian frontier. The area of Bialystok covering roughly 5,800 square miles was thus re-allocated to Poland. This transfer was advantageous for the Soviet Union since the B.S.S.R. rid itself thereby of a Polish population of 1,000,000 and thus considerably reduced the seriousness of the minority problem within its boundaries.

After the annexation of Western Byelorussia the minority issue threatened to cause considerable worry to the Minsk Government, since half of the annexed population were either Poles or Jews. In the post-war B.S.S.R. this problem no longer arose not only because of the substantial frontier rectification in Poland's favour in the Bialystok area,

563 but also, as in the case of the Ukraine, because of the transfer of Poles and Hitler's extermination of the Jews.

Another important task resulting from the annexation of Western Byelorussia still remains to be carried out by the Government of the B.S.S.R. A large proportion of the Western Byelorussians have little or no Byelorussian national consciousness, and they speak some sort of [197] local Slav dialect which they themselves do not identify as Byelorussian. This applies in particular to the population of Polesia where Polish statistics counted over 700,000 such 'local Slavs'. 'Greater Byelorussia' is now about to round off the formation of a Byelorussian nation by amalgamating the various brands of Byelorussians, not only formally in a purely administrative sense, but also politically and spiritually.

177.56 563 [195] This process, intended to effect the transformation of the Western Byelorussians into a full 'sovietized' people, has encountered considerable opposition, particularly among the Roman Catholics who had formed 20 per cent of the entire Byelorussian minority of the former North-Eastern Poland. The Roman Catholic Byelorussians had always most violently opposed the thesis of the 'brotherhood' between Byelorussians and Great Russians and their political organization under the Polish régime, the Christian Democratic Union, significantly called itself 'Byeloruthenian' instead of 'Byelorussian'.

186 Byelorussian opposition to the Soviet régime is dictated not only by economic and religious motives but also by national considerations. Although it has united Western and Eastern Byelorussia, the Soviet Government has offended Byelorussian nationalism by leaving the city of Vilna outside the Byelorussian 'State'. The Western Byelorussians looked upon Vilna as their national cultural centre and there may have been indeed a good case for including it in Byelorussia, but it was politically more expedient to make it the capital of Soviet Lithuania.

The difficulties which the Soviet régime had to face in post-war Byelorussia were not confined to the new western territories. The whole of Byelorussia had been occupied by the Germans for two to three years, and it was only natural that Soviet propaganda had to start in many respects right from the beginning when the Red Army re-entered Byelorussian territory. A statement by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party heralding the new propaganda campaign admitted indirectly that German Nazi propaganda had been successful among Byelorussians. The Communist Party organizations of Byelorussia were instructed in this statement to overcome 'the anti-collectivist and anti-state tendencies' with which the German occupants had indoctrinated the Byelorussian people.[35]

Many expressions of Byelorussian nationalism, however, existed quite independently of the moral consequences of German occupation. Judging by official Soviet admissions, Byelorussian nationalism, particularly